

Message Text

PAGE 01 NATO 00081 101730Z

51

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C O N F I D E N T I A L USNATO 0081

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: BEXP, NATO, MILI

SUBJECT: PRESS COVERAGE OF AWACS

BEGIN SUMMARY: JOHN W. FINNEY'S NYT STORY ON AWACS LIKELY TO
DAMAGE EFFORTS UNDERWAY IN ALLIANCE TOWARD COMMON PROCUREMENT
OF AWACS. TO POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FROM ALLIES. REQUEST
GUIDANCE ON HOW TO RESPOND TO POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FROM ALLIES.

END SUMMARY.

1. MISSION VIEWS 7 JAN NYT ARTICLE BY JOHN W. FINNEY TITLED "PENTA-
GON SEEKS JUSTIFICATION TO BUILD ITS MOST COSTLY JET" CARRIED
IN 8 JAN PARIS HERALD TRIBUNE AND QUESTIONS CONCERNING ARTICLE
ADDRESSED TO BEECHER IN 8 JAN DOD MORNING NEWS BRIEFING AS
DAMAGING TO NATO AWACS EFFORT. ALLEGATION THAT INDEPENDENT PANEL'S
REPORT SUPPORTS SENATOR EAGLETON AND GAO CHARGES THAT AWACS
UNABLE TO PERFORM EUROPEAN MISSION, WHETHER REFUTED LATER OR
NOT, LIKELY TO CREATE LASTING DOUBT IN MINDS OF NON-TECHNICALLY
ORIENTED ALLIED GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WHO WILL INFLUENCE FUNDING
AND PROCUREMENT DECISIONS.

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PAGE 02 NATO 00081 101730Z

2. MISSION ANTICIPATES QUESTIONS ON THE STORY FROM
CONCERNED ALLIES AND POSSIBLY THE EUROPEAN PRESS. OUR UNDER-
STANDING IS THAT THE SMITH PANEL, WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING THAT ANY
SYSTEM CAN BE COUNTERED IF HIGH ENOUGH PRICE IS PAID, GENERALLY

CONCLUDED THAT AWACS IS THE BEST THERE IS. WE ASSUME FINNEY'S ARTICLE BASED ON SOME STATEMENTS IN REPORT TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT.

3. MISSION WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO RESPOND TO QUESTIONS AS FOLLOWS:

A. REPORT OF INDEPENDENT PANEL ON AWACS HAS NOT BEEN RELEASED, THEREFORE, FINNEY'S OR ANY OTHER STORY ABOUT REPORT'S CONCLUSIONS IS PURE SPECULATION AND PROBABLY BASED ON "LEAKS" OR HEARSAY TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT.

B. ANY SYSTEM CAN BE COUNTERED IF ENEMY IS WILLING TO PAY HIGH ENOUGH PRICE; HOWEVER, AWACS IS MOST ADVANCED AND CAPABLE SYSTEM OF ITS TYPE IN THE WORLD, WITH SEVERAL ORDERS OF MAGNITUDE IMPROVEMENT IN JAM RESISTANCE OVER ANY POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE. COST IN MONEY AND EFFORT TO COUNTER AWACS WOULD BE PROHIBITIVE. WE EXPECT REPORT TO SUPPORT DOD POSITION THAT AWACS CAN PERFORM EUROPEAN MISSION IN AN ENTIRELY SATISFACTORY AND COST EFFECTIVE MANNER.

C. AWACS WAS DESIGNED FROM THE START TO PERFORM BOTH THE STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL MISSIONS. ONLY THE NAME CHANGED WHEN PRIMARY MISSION WAS CHANGED IN 1972 AND SYSTEM SWITCHED FROM STRATEGIC TO GENERAL PURPOSE FORCES.

D. THE \$109 MILLION DOLLAR COST ALLEGED FOR AWACS IS TOO HIGH. IN ANY EVENT, WITH R&D COSTS WAIVED EXCEPT FOR A SMALL SURCHARGE, THE COST OF NATO AWACS TO OUR ALLIES WOULD BE APPROXIMATELY 1/3 OF THAT FIGURE, THE EXACT AMOUNT DEPENDING ON NATO CONFIGURATION AND PRODUCTION RATES.

4. REQUEST GUIDANCE ON APPROACH AND RESPONSE TO INQUIRIES ON FINNEY'S STORY ON AWACS.
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